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Family Matters

Improving health together

Take the Fruit Challenge!

Sheila Gains, Family & Consumer Science Extension Agent in Arapahoe County

Challenge yourself to eat and serve more fruits this winter. If you are not eating 2 or more servings of fruit a day, challenge yourself to substitute at least one serving of a high fat or high sugar food with a serving of fruit each day. Keep the challenge up for 6 weeks and it might just become a habit. Adults are advised to eat approximately 2 cups of fruit a day. It is recommended that children eat 1-2 cups of fruit per day. The amount depends on your daily calorie needs. For a specific recommendations visit www.ChooseMyPlate.gov.



Fresh and frozen fruit is full of vitamins, minerals, plant based chemicals, fiber and water. Canned and dried fruits also have health benefits. However, some of the nutrients may have been lost in the processing of these foods, and sugars may have been added.

The natural sugar in fruits can satisfy a sweet tooth the same as a cookie or holiday sweet, but with more nutritional benefits. Studies show that as people increase the amount of fruit and vegetables they eat each day, they also decrease their risks of stroke, diabetes, cancer, heart disease and high blood pressure. Take advantage of the abundance of fresh, frozen and dried fruit in grocery stores. Look for seasonal pomegranates, cranberries, Asian pears, persimmons, dates, figs, and other holiday dried fruits. Fall apples are still available this time of year and new citrus crops will start arriving from California and Florida.

Keep a bowl of fruit on the counter and put holiday cookies and treats in a tin or container with a lid. Then put them in a cupboard or pantry so they are out of sight. By doing this you are making it easier to reach for the fruit when hunger strikes, reserving less healthy foods for a special occasion.

Fruit is best eaten fresh and plain (no added sugar, fat, etc) the way nature intended. Fruit can be added to other dishes, enhancing taste and nutrition. For example, sprinkle some pomegranate seeds on a fresh green salad, glaze skinless chicken breast with a sauce made from dried apricots, mustard and a little honey. Try diced pineapple on pizza. Apples go well with pork and cranberries compliment poultry and beef. Spread toast with applesauce instead of jelly. Slice bananas on top of hot or cold cereal instead of adding sugar. A splash of lemon or lime juice in a soup, stew or bowl of steamed vegetables can make a dish tastier and healthier at the same time. In addition to the vitamin C, the sour flavor of citrus juice intensifies other flavors. This helps reduce the amount of salt and fat you might otherwise add.

Fruit desserts are quick, easy and tasty. Try making fruit kabobs by alternating fresh fruit on wooden skewers or long tooth picks. Try alternating strawberries, or watermelon and kiwi fruit for a holiday dessert... Fruit parfaits are also popular, simply layer fresh fruit, and low fat yogurt or pudding in individual cups or a large clear bowl. Serve fruit smoothies for an appetizer or for dessert.

Let's Talk

Explain to children the benefits of eating more fruit, ask them to come up with a list of fruits they like to eat, or would like to try. You could even ask children to create and make their own fruit recipes. Because of the natural sweetness of fruits they are usually well accepted by children. Be a good role model and reach for fruit instead of sweets. Praise children for the good choices they make.

Recipe for Health:

Winter Fruit Crisp

Note: This recipe can be made gluten free by substituting gluten free oat flour for the all purpose and whole wheat flours. Oats are naturally gluten free but can become contaminated with gluten in processing, so look for oats and oat flours that are labeled gluten free. Gluten is a protein found in a variety of grains such as wheat. Some people are sensitive to gluten and should avoid foods containing gluten if advised to do so by their health care professional.

Ingredients

2 tablespoons	cinnamon
3 tablespoons	margarine or butter(soft melted)
1/2 cup	sugar
3 tablespoons	all purpose flour (or oat flour)
1 teaspoon	lemon peel (grated)
5 cups	apples (unpeeled, sliced)
1 cup	cranberries (fresh)
2/3 cups	rolled oats
1/3 cup	brown sugar (packed)
1/4 cup	whole wheat flour or oat flour



Instructions

Filling:

1. Combine $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar, 3 Tablespoons flour, and lemon peel in a medium bowl and mix well.
2. Stir in apples and cranberries.
3. Spoon into a greased 6-cup baking dish.

Topping:

1. Combine oats, $\frac{1}{3}$ cup brown sugar, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup flour, and cinnamon in a small bowl.
2. Stir in melted margarine/butter.
3. Sprinkle topping over filling.
4. Bake at 375 degrees for 30- 40 minutes or until filling is bubbly and top is brown.
5. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Other optional add-ins include, chopped nuts or raisins.